



Community garden guidance

## What's a community garden?

The beauty of a community garden is that it does not need to be defined! It is whatever the local group managing it wants and needs it to be.

Commonly they are areas where fresh food is grown, but can also be for beautiful botanicals, wildlife habitats, and outdoor havens. Essentially a community garden is an open space, suitable for growing plants, run and formally managed by the actual gardeners themselves.

Often these are reclaimed and transformed sites where people can come together to grow produce but also to improve their local environment and work to grow as a community, with all the social and health benefits that can bestow.



“...they can be for beautiful botanicals, wildlife habitats, and outdoor havens.”



## What are some of the benefits?

### Visual

Revitalising a disused or run down patch of land will always bring visual benefits; making an area look more cared for, beautiful and interesting.



Visual

### Community

Gardening can bring different cultures and generations together, re-engage or just express a sense of neighbourhood. The benefits are for the whole community, even those not directly involved in the work.



### Civic pride

Taking ownership and standing up for an area can lead to restored confidence, potentially reducing Anti Social Behaviour and its negative impact on wellbeing.



### Wellbeing

Gardening and enjoying outdoor spaces has mental and physical benefits to health. Not to mention opportunities to eat nutritional, healthy, local food.



Wellbeing

### Environmental

More plants inevitably results in habitat creation and supports bio-diversity. Community gardening often includes vegetable planters and plots, fruit trees and bushes – enabling truly local food production and reducing food miles.

#### Gardening tips to reduce your carbon footprint

[WWF Carbon footprint calculator](#) – try this quick quiz to see what your footprint is like!



Environmental

## Where do I start?

If you are interested in community gardening there are a wealth of online resources to help you with your research. We have pulled together below a checklist outlining some of the information which you will need to consider to get started. There is quite a lot of housekeeping to consider before the forks and spades can go in!

### Finding a space and getting permission

If you have identified a site you must get permission from the landowner. This could be an individual or developer, or a public body such as the council. If you believe it to be council owned please do contact us at [aspire@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:aspire@ashford.gov.uk), but if private you can find out ownership using a [Land Registry search](#) to identify the owner, which does incur a small fee.

At this early stage it is important to consider water provision. If you can't find evidence of a water source and the owner isn't sure, contact [South East Water](#) to find out if there is a water meter or connection possible.

### Lease

Any landowner is going to be concerned about liability for injury on their land, assurances that it will be used appropriately and certainty that the site will be vacated as agreed. This will require a legal agreement to be drawn up between your group and the site donor. Although the start of your project will be full of good will and optimism it is essential that there are clear boundaries and expectations. The function of legal documents are to provide a back up if problems arise that cannot be resolved through normal negotiation and are an essential security for both parties, even if they are unlikely to be used.

Generally the landowner will not require much remuneration for the use of their land, but in return

will expect the group to take on the responsibility for the site and its users during the lease period.

It may be useful to draw up a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the partners (community group and landowner) as this clearly outlines the expectations each party has of the other, often in less formal language. Although MOU are not legally binding they can sit alongside a rental agreement, setting out a common line of action and goals. Each agreement and/or lease will require specific negotiations pertaining to the use of the site and the peculiarities of its location and contents.

In order to enter a lease your group will benefit from some structure and form.

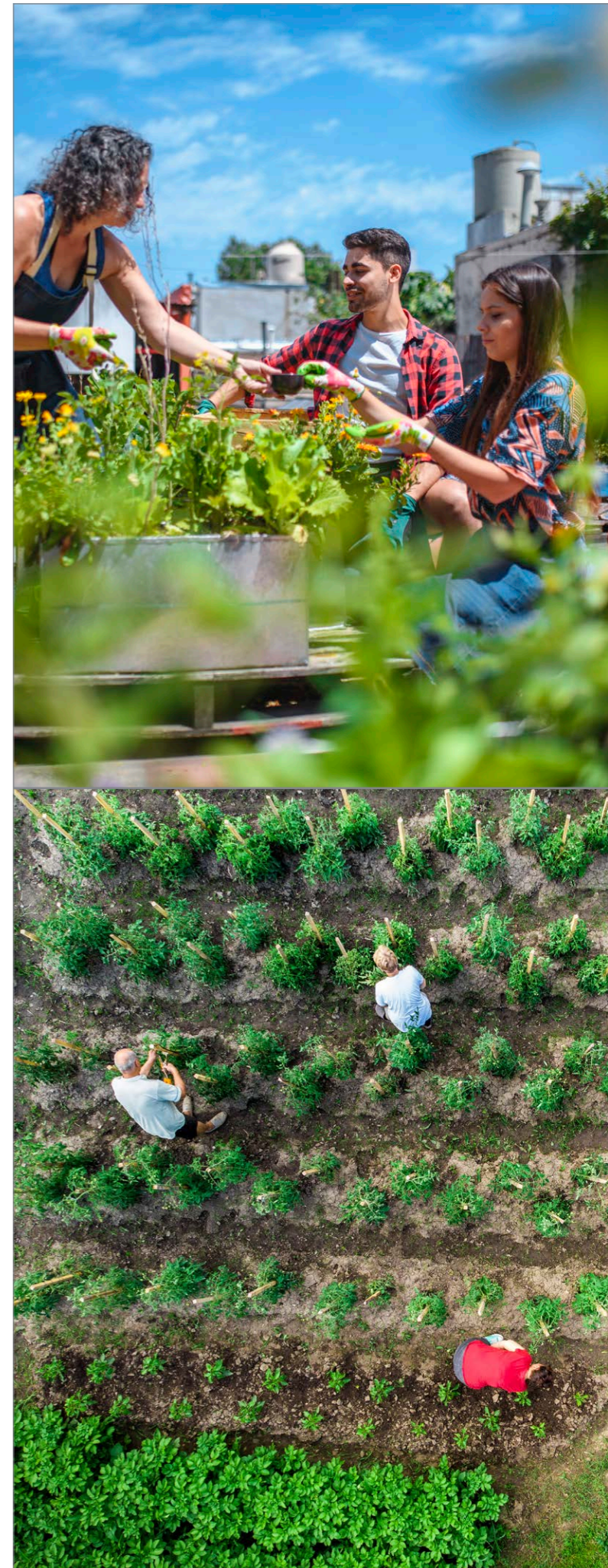
### Structure of your group

Although successful gardening groups and projects grow organically. It is worth considering the set up of your group structure and how you wish the administration to run at the start. If you are going to apply for grants, have a bank account, manage a lease, use social media and organise volunteers this is going to be important.

Many groups run as a charity, as they exist for public benefit and are generally funded by grants and donations. Charities are not however legal structures and decisions need to be made on whether or not you want your membership to have voting rights or to be run by a small group who are appointed without election. Groups can also either be incorporated (where the organisation becomes a legal entity) or unincorporated (where the organisation is recognised as a collection of individuals).

Gov.uk provides some further information on [choosing a charitable structure](#) and [setting up a charity](#).

If you intend to generate income to fund your project, you are more likely to be required to set up an incorporated structure such as a Company limited by guarantee (community interest company), a cooperative society or Community Benefit Society.





“...Gardening and enjoying outdoor spaces brings many social and health benefits to all age groups.”

## The Constitution – set up with clear objectives in mind

It is useful to write a constitution for your group outlining its aims, how it will be run and who is responsible. It doesn't have to be a long onerous document and can be written as bullet points, but having one will no doubt help with funding applications as it gives reassurances that your group is properly set up and accountable.

An outline could include:

- The groups' objectives, what are the main aims of the group. You may want to select some of the **benefits listed on page 3**
- How it will be run – regularity of meetings, elected posts, any legal entity details
- Who is responsible – posts and individuals including Secretary and Treasurer.
- Funding – how you intend to fund your project
- Access to the site – how this will be managed
- How volunteers will be inducted – what the group will provide them in terms of PPE and training
- A statement outlining how everyone is expected to behave towards each other
- Role of volunteers – what they are expected to do (particularly focus on safety).

This will inevitably evolve but changes should be signed off at committee meetings or annual meetings.

Building in some project evaluation at the start may also help you later attract funding if you can demonstrate the impact your project is having on the community, this can be as simple as before and after photographs or a local survey asking people how they feel about the area they live in before works start and then again a year or two later.

## Set up Support

It might be useful to affiliate with an organisation like the RHS – **'It's your neighbourhood' scheme** as its membership requirements will guide you to ensure you have certain structures in place. Please note there are other gardening organisations offering support.

## Insurance

If your group has volunteers on site you will need public liability and indemnity insurance to ensure the group and the landlord is covered should any accident occur on site. This is mandatory if you employ anyone and is likely to be a condition of any lease. This is available to purchase from any insurance broker, although there are gardening group specialist firms available too.

You may also require insurance for the property on the site including sheds, garden equipment owned by the group or its responsibility.

## Risk Assessments

The group has a responsibility to its members to ensure it has done all it can to avoid accidents and stop people getting hurt. It is impossible to completely eliminate all risk but a risk assessment will help you to identify possible hazards and consider what control measures can be introduced to mitigate the chances of harms, such as advice, training or practical changes to the site. The potential risks to consider are wide ranging and could include trip hazards, safe structures, asbestos, extended sun exposure, chemical exposure, cuts and risk of tetanus to back strains. Below are two links to some examples of risk assessments for gardening groups, but please note these are not exhaustive and a site specific assessment must be undertaken.

**RHS – community gardening sample Risk Assessment**

## Set up Costs and Fundraising

Although the labour required to set up your garden will hopefully come from volunteers, there will be some ongoing costs and most likely some set up expenditure. There will inevitably be some unforeseen costs but writing a budget plan for the year ahead, however simple, will help you gauge what the right funding routes might be and how much you might need. If you have anything large to buy, it is good practice to get three quotes from different suppliers to make sure you get the best price.

Funding can come from a variety of sources but if you are clear about what your project aims to achieve and what the benefits are it will help you target the right funding sources, market your project well and increase the success. Ideas include:

- Fundraisers – These could be from your own organised fundraising events, such as raffles, plant sales, fetes.

- Trusts and Foundations – set up by companies or individuals that give small grants to particular interest groups. Gardening groups can meet many different funding criteria, environmental improvement, health, youth, elderly, intergenerational, biodiversity.
- Sponsorship from a local business or individual may also be appropriate.
- Grant opportunities:

**Big lottery fund** – has grant opportunities for all scale of projects.

**Kent Community Foundation** – has an Environment strand of funding for projects that improve local spaces and encourage more sustainable ways of living.

**Funding for all** – Free, expert fundraising advice service for to small charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises across Kent. They will help develop bid writing skills as well as providing a comprehensive, updated list of funding opportunities for you to search.



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## Design your garden

The internet contains a vast array of support groups to give you ideas, experiences and advice. These range from gardening groups, permaculture associations to familiar organisations such as the Royal Horticultural Society.

Many permaculture and community gardens use a design framework based on the following to get started.

**Survey** – what are your building blocks, what are limiting factors, understand your soil, aspect, biodiversity. What is your water source? What do the community want? Draw a diagram of your space, showing where and when parts are shaded.

**Analyse** – Use the information you have collected above, to help you site different elements in your garden, where needs shelter from wind, where are the sunny and shady patches.

**Design** – Draw a map of your garden. Zone your areas for sheds, green houses, annuals, vegetables, trees, wild zones etc. Doing a sectional plan will also help you visualise layers of planting and how structures will fit in.

**Implement** – An action plan is very important, this must include not only tasks but how many volunteers you need for each task. How much do you need to spend in advance for structures and plants. A planting plan will also save a lot of time when you come to plant up.

**Maintain** – Again a work plan will be helpful here to ensure all the jobs that need to be done to look after your garden are done and so that everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing and when. Someone needs to remember to do the watering! It is worth considering if you are going to have action blitz days and distribute key responsibilities to designated individuals.

**Tweak** – Evaluating what worked over the last year and taking learning on board is key to success. You can evaluate your year with a group discussion or use a questionnaire, as well as quantitative methods for measuring success, such as measures of biodiversity or harvest yields.



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## Getting things moving – Volunteers

An online search will give you lots of ideas and case studies of volunteer projects that have worked well. The key however is good organisation and making sure you have an action plan and schedule of work.

It is quite a feat organising a task force with varying skills, availability and needs. Volunteers give up their time to help and need to feel that they have achieved something worthwhile at the end of a day's work.

Attracting volunteers is generally the easy bit (word of mouth, adverts, posters) keeping volunteers sustained and interested is far more challenging. It is useful when you sign people up to your project to ask them to fill in a form outlining their skills, what type of work they want to and don't want to do, do they have any particular needs on site and understand what they want to get out of the project so you can place volunteers to the most appropriate roles. You may feel that some formal or informal training might be appropriate.

You may have already outlined the design for your community garden but if not a design workshop with your volunteers may be a good way to get everyone engaged. Ideas storm what people would like to see eg wildlife areas, play areas, seating, raised beds for the elderly etc.

If you intend to involve children or at risk adults in your project you must ensure you have a safeguarding procedure in place. There are many templates on line for policies and some **government guidance can be found here**.

**The Ashford Volunteer Centre** is a very useful resource for running strong and safely run volunteer groups, with a plethora of information often with a local slant and local contacts for support.



## Further reading

Below is a list of some support sites, we have found useful and interesting when pulling together this guidance. It is not exhaustive and please note that Ashford Borough Council is not responsible for content or advice sourced from these sites.

The Royal Horticultural Society site provides a good amount of detail and signpost the **Its Your Neighbourhood programme** run by Britain in Bloom, that provides support to new and established groups in a national network and framework.

If you wish to speak to other local groups about how they went through the process, it may be useful to contact South and South Eastern in Bloom campaign managers, [anne@sseib.com](mailto:anne@sseib.com) Anne Holman or [kate@sseib.com](mailto:kate@sseib.com) Kate Harris.

## Other useful links

**Limes Community Garden** – For real inspiration and to see a local working community garden in action visit The Limes Community Garden Facebook page. They are happy for you to message them your queries and share their experiences.

**RHS advice on how to set up a community garden**

**Social Farms and Gardens** – UK charity supporting community gardens

**Permaculture garden design methodology**

Get inspired at the **Edible bus stop**

Search community gardens on **Pinterest** for lots of design ideas

**Advice from the Eden Project** – ideas and inspiration for making your garden work and pay

**The Incredible Edible**

**Kent Wildlife Trust** – for advice on supporting nature and creating species rich spaces

**KCC Reconnect** – if you have opportunities that could support and engage young people in your project.

